

December 2012

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Office of School Innovations

Field notes..... Fall/Winter

Happy Anniversary!

As you probably know by now, this year marks the 10th anniversary of Maryland's Charter School Law. Our commemoration coincides with the 20 year anniversary of charter schools in our country. Now is an ideal time reflect on the impact charter schools have made in the lives of Maryland children and families and to look forward to the next decade of building and sustaining high quality charter schools. Our community must embrace opportunities to continually glean from and share best practices on scaling excellent school choices for all children. Recently, the national charter school associations convened their annual conferences, and members of Maryland's charter school community attended these events. A resonating theme between the two conferences was (1) high quality educational options and accountability, and (2) collaboration to build and sustain excellent schools for all children in America. The Alliance and NACSA provided myriad resources to develop and maintain high quality charter schools. We have included links to some of these resources for you to access. You may also visit The Alliance's website at www.publiccharters.org and NACSA at www.qualitycharters.org. This document includes a short synopsis of national trends and practices being implemented in charter schools throughout the country. Access to this information can inform the work toward innovation, school improvement, and academic excellence in Maryland's charter schools. This office also has developed resources aligned to national best practices that will support actions to build and sustain high quality educational programs and accountability measures that foster continuous improvement. Maryland's *Model Application* for charter schools and *Model Performance Contract* are currently available on our web site www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/charterschools. Maryland's *Quality Standards For Charter Schools* (the Standards) provide a framework of indicators, standards, performance measures and critical success factors that have been established as best practices of charter school quality and will be available after the New Year. The accompanying *Self-Assessment Tool*, currently in the developmental phase, is being designed to help charter schools in the state determine and document the extent to which the quality standards are being achieved in charter schools. This tool is also intended to facilitate the charter school monitoring and compliance efforts of each local education agency (LEA) and is currently being piloted by four (4) charter schools. The *Self-Assessment Tool*, will be available to the community by school year 2013.

We hope that you will further explore the resources shared in this newsletter to expand excellent innovative options for education in your communities.

Thank you for all that you do for children and families in Maryland.

The Office of School Innovations



National Alliance of Public Charter Schools (NACPS)

NAPCS convened its 12th annual conference on June 19 – 22, 2012 in Minneapolis, MN. The theme of this year's conference was 20 Years of Innovation: Proving the Possibilities. National charter school pioneer and Founder/CEO of Harlem Village Academies (www.harlemvillageacademies.com) Dr. Deborah Kenny, and well-known education advocate and comedian, Bill Cosby, led the opening session focused on - public education and the impact of public charter schools. In this session Mr. Cosby explored Dr. Kenny's perspective on what it takes to create schools where every classroom is led by a superstar teacher. Kenny shared findings from her recently published book *Born to Rise*. Education's most burning question, "How do we give every child in our nation an excellent teacher – and how do we keep those teachers passionate, happy and effective?" was surveyed and discussed during the opening session as well as throughout several conference break-out sessions. *Born to Rise* is hailed as a testament to what teachers can accomplish when given the support they deserve. It shares the importance of excellent teachers and building ownership instead of buy in. Complimentary copies of this critically acclaimed book can be obtained by visiting <http://borntorise.overdrive.com/>

Best Practices

Designs for Learning (www.designlearn.net), Minneapolis, MN, provided attendees with ten essential best practices implemented by high performing charter schools throughout the country. The session examined disparities in student performance among genders, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status and showed participants that the achievement gap exists in grade point averages, dropout rates, college enrollment, and college-completion rates- not just standardized test scores. Several "Gap Closing Schools" identified by Charter School Partners (www.charterschoolpartners.org) share many common practices that are employed by all Gap-Closing schools in Minnesota. These features were identified as:

1. Coherent Instructional Philosophy
2. Culture of Achievement & High Expectations
3. Rigorous Curriculum
4. Data Driven Decision Making
5. Continuous Formative Assessments
6. Frequent Informal Observations
7. Targeted Student Support & Intervention
8. Reading & Writing Across Curriculum
9. Interventions and Support beyond academics
10. Individualized Professional Development & Staff Training



Charter schools that have been identified as gap closing schools were found to have developed their own curriculum maps to align the curriculum with benchmarks and use "real-time" data (daily or weekly) to guide re-teaching and revision of lesson/unit planning. Students in these schools are familiar with their own data. Gap closing charter schools also demonstrate the belief that assessment paired with instructional modifications generates growth (not assessment alone). Student intervention is delivered throughout the year, not at the end.

Overall, charter schools in Maryland achieve the state's Annual Measurable Objectives on the MSA and HSA evaluations, but achievement gaps persist in each calculated area. While most charter schools are innovating best practices in our state, further consideration and deeper analysis on what is being done nationally to eliminate the achievement gap is recommended. You may reach Designs for Learning and Charter School Partners by accessing their web addresses.

National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA)

NACSA held its 2012 Leadership Conference on October 22 – 25, 2012 in Memphis, TN. The opening session- *Chartering Turns 20: Producing a Record of Success in the Next 20 Years of Charter School Authorizing*, resonated how state agencies, law makers, and authorizers can work together to make good decisions about accountability systems and ensuring that authorizers are provided with the support necessary to ensure that only high performing charter schools exist.

The 2012 revision of NACSA's *Principles & Standards* was announced and is now available. The new edition identifies three Core Principles:

1. Maintain High Standards for Schools,
2. Uphold School Autonomy,
3. Protect Student and Public Interests.

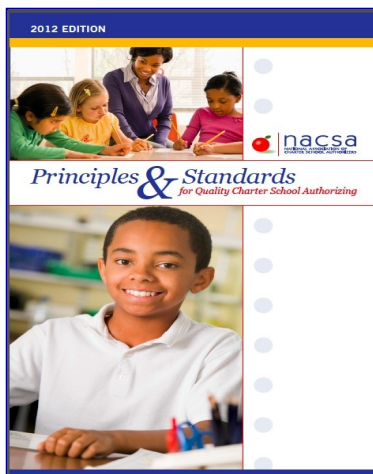
And, reiterates Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing. This guide is accessible on NACSA's web site.



The 2012 Leadership Conference served as the platform for NACSA to announce its' *One Million Lives* campaign. This is aimed to provide one million children a great education by giving them the educational opportunities they deserve. According to NACSA, authorizers play a vital role in ensuring that children have great schools. Developing expertise, improving practices, building the capacity of authorizing offices, and advancing strong policy, will significantly contribute to the profession of authorizing. Below is what NACSA proposes to begin impacting the quality of charter schools now-

- Improve Authorizing Practices
- Develop and Support Your Authorizing Office
- Deepen Your Expertise (Authorizer Expertise)
- Advocate for Strong Law and Policy

For further details about *One Million Lives* and actions to take under the aforementioned recommendations, log onto NACSA's web site and click on *One Million Lives* 'what's new.'





Authorizer Management: Managing Up Your Board



The boards to which authorizers report play a critical role in deciding the fate of new and existing schools. Oftentimes, because of the busy day-to-day authorizer responsibilities as well as other assigned duties, the concept of “managing up” to boards may not occur to Authorizers. But according to NACSA, quality authorizing depends in large part on boards that have the knowledge and support to make critical decisions and perform key responsibilities effectively. This session, engaged why board management is critical to quality authorizing, and shared best practices for managing up, and supporting boards. Authorizers and Board members from *Nashville Metropolitan School District*; *Orleans Parish School Board*; and *Arizona State Board for Charter Schools* shared insights on effective strategies for charter school authorizers to work effectively to educate and support Boards with charter-related decisions. The following recommendations were made:

- Suggest and coordinate new Board member orientation about charter school authorizing and processes
- Provide key information to the Board prior to business meetings
- Be transparent about all information and evidence related to chartering and decisions that have to be made.
- Be timely with information for the Board.
- Anticipate “what’s next” questions from the Board and be prepared with responses.
- Document, Document, Document
- Educate Boards on process vs. policy
- Ground authorizing and chartering in “purpose” and keep that purpose at the forefront of all work with the Board.

Participants utilized the above-referenced strategies to resolve potential Board-related authorizing challenges in a case study. To obtain contact information of the facilitators please contact the Office of School Innovations at 410.767.3677, or email mtaylor@msde.state.md.us. You may also obtain a copy of the case study.

Upcoming Conferences

2013 Conferences

National Alliance of Public Charter Schools

June 30—July 3, 2013

Washington, DC



**National Association of Charter School Author-
izers' Leadership Conference**

October 21—24, 2013

San Diego, CA

Please refer to the Office of School Innovation's webpage at www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/charterschools to obtain the most recent versions of Maryland's Model Performance Contract and Model Application for charter schools. You may reach a staff member directly at 410.767.3677.

Upcoming Publications

- ◆ Maryland's Quality Standards for Charter Schools
- ◆ Self Assessment Tool